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SUBJECT: A/S FRIED AND COUNSELOR COHEN DISCUSS KOSOVO, IRAN
AND CFE WITH FRENCH POLITICAL DIRECTOR

Classified By: AMB Craig Stapleton for reasons 1.4 (B & D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: In a June 25 meeting on the margins of the Secretary's visit to Paris -- and prior to the ministerial

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meeting that evening on Kosovo -- A/S Fried and Counselor Cohen discussed Kosovo, Iran, and Russia/CFE with MFA Political Director Araud. They generally agreed on the three options dealing with Kosovo's inevitable independence -- A) the current draft UNSC Resolution likely to be vetoed by Russia if forced to a vote; B) a "minimalist" UNSCR designed to legitimize a continuing international presence and prepare the ground for independence but itself ambiguous on status; and C) a 120-to-180 day period at the end of which decisions would be taken on a new UNSCR or proceeding to independence in the absence of a UNSCR. Araud and Fried differed on operational "nuances," with Araud arguing for more ambiguity to bring along the Russians, and A/S Fried stressing the importance of clarity about independence to reassure the Kosovars. They agreed that any future negotiations should probably be under the auspices of the Contact Group to avoid the creation of "a new Ahtisaari" and to try to gain Russian buy-in and isolate Serbian PM Kostunica as the obdurate party. On substance, Fried suggested focusing on implementation of the Ahtisaari recommendations, with Araud more receptive to reopening them to some degree to demonstrate that the negotiations were real. There was a brief discussion of how to respond in the event of Kosovar UDI. A/S Fried stressed the importance of firm rejection of any Russian attempts to link Kosovo's independence to recognition of Abkhazia.

12. (C) In a discussion with Counselor Cohen on Iran, Araud supported an additional UNSC Resolution on financial sanctions, while complaining about lack of U.S. coordination in tabling its latest draft. In response to the Counselor's presentation on Iranian machinations, Araud argued that Hizballah at times in some respects was playing by the rules of the "Lebanese political game" and that Iran's role there was not necessarily nefarious. Arguing the necessity for France of engaging Iran as a means of influencing the situation in Lebanon, he also objected to the U.S. characterization of Hizballah as a terrorist organization.

13. (C) On CFE, worried that Russia's suspension of its CFE obligations could take on a life of its own, the French argued for a new initiative: agreement to negotiate a new treaty to prevent what they saw as a risk of de facto unraveling of the CFE regime that would free Russia to deploy forces anywhere on its territory. A/S Fried cautioned

against rewarding the Russians for bad behavior and said that any new negotiations would need to be based on continuing compliance with the existing treaty during that time. He noted that Russia, at least for the moment, appeared comfortable with the offensive tactic of controlled confrontation with the West. END SUMMARY.

¶4. (SBU) Accompanied by the Ambassador, EUR A/S Fried and Counselor Cohen met June 25 with MFA Political Director Gerard Araud on the margins of the Secretary's June 24-26 visit to Paris. Araud was accompanied by his Deputy Veronique Bujon-Barre, AS-equivalent for Strategic Affairs Philippe Carre and a desk officer, FM Kouchner cabinet advisor Philippe Errera, and executive assistant Gael Veyssiere. NSC Senior Director Bradley, DCM and POL Deputy (notetaker) joined on the U.S. side.

Kosovo Options -----

¶5. (C) Citing President Sarkozy's remarks at the G8 Summit in Germany, Araud said France viewed Kosovo's independence as inevitable, foresaw a six-month negotiation period between the parties to attempt to come to additional understandings, and was prepared to recognize Kosovo's independence at the end of the six-month period come what may. It would also seek the support of other EU member states for this approach, including recognition of Kosovo's independence when the time came.

¶6. (C) A/S Fried responded that the French position as described by Araud formed a solid basis upon which to prepare that day's later ministerial meeting on Kosovo. He then recapitulated the three-option plan as presented the previous day with Presidential Diplomatic Advisor Jean-David Levitte: (A) Determine whether the Russians will refuse the current draft UNSC Resolution based on Sarkozy's idea of independence after four to six months of negotiations; A/S Fried assured

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Araud that the U.S. would not force a vote on the UNSCR and risk a Russian veto without prior coordination with the Europeans; (B) Pursue a "minimalist" UNSCR aimed at legitimizing the presence of the EU and the International Office (IO), and possibly NATO if UNSCR 1244 was considered insufficient for this purpose, combined with four to six months of negotiations at the end of which there would be recognition; and (C) if it turned out that no UNSCR would be possible, four to six months of negotiations would commence, with a final attempt being made at the end of that period either to pass a final UNSCR and proceed immediately with or without a UNSCR to recognition. A/S Fried judged that while we were currently following plan (A), we would likely need to move to plan (B) following Putin's meeting with the President at Kennebunkport.

Engaging the Russians -----

¶7. (C) Araud agreed that prospects for plan (A) were dim, given Russian UNSC PermRep Churkin's contemptuous rejection of the current draft UNSCR. He nonetheless held out hope that plan (B) might still be achievable, given that the Russians had discerned some moves in their direction, even if they were deemed insufficient, and that it had rejected a four-month negotiating period as too short. Araud informed A/S Fried that he planned to travel to Moscow July 2-4 to engage the Russians in further discussions. So far the Russians had not engaged, but he had called Russian Ambassador to Paris Avdeyev to urge him not to view diplomacy as a zero-sum game, to extol the virtues of constructive ambiguity, and stress the importance of political will to compromise. But he had received no response.

¶8. (C) A/S Fried assured Araud that the U.S. could accept plan (B), which would provide an umbrella for the

international presence and set the stage for subsequent recognition. He urged caution, however, in exploring a minimalist UNSCR with the Russians, lest they attempt to insert "poison pill" language that would effectively exclude a change of status for Kosovo. Ambiguity was acceptable, unless of course they actually were prepared to take a more positive approach. Araud agreed that the question to be answered was whether the Russians would be prepared "to play the diplomatic game" of accelerating ambiguity. He agreed with A/S Fried that it was unlikely the Kennebunkport meeting would lead to Russian acceptance of plan (A).

Need to Reassure Kosovars Also

¶9. (C) A/S Fried reminded Araud that managing the next four to six months also meant maintaining the confidence of the Kosovars, who would be willing to accept further delay only if it was accompanied by clarity and Western unity with regard to the end result of independence. An absence of clarity could equally lead to panic and disorder, even disintegration if the Kosovars came to believe the West was deceiving them and reopening the Ahtisaari findings. Operationally, it would be important that the June 25 informal meeting of ministers on Kosovo produce an agreement that plans (A), (B), and (C) were acceptable only so long as the bottom line remained that independence was unavoidable and without more delay. The difficulty was that this message also needed to be conveyed to the Kosovars, which contradicted the goal of bringing along the Russians through ambiguity. A/S Fried reminded Araud -- citing the President's and Secretary's statements -- that U.S. policy has been to tell the Kosovars clearly that they would achieve independence, and be recognized by the U.S. and key European allies.

¶10. (C) Thinking aloud, Araud wondered whether it might be best to take national approaches to Kosovo's independence: France could rely on Sarkozy's statement, just as the U.S. could cite the President and the Secretary. But he saw a problem in the putative dilemma -- which he said FM Kouchner had raised with the Secretary -- of claiming simultaneously that negotiations were real and that they would produce a specific outcome. A/S Fried reiterated the importance of assuring the Kosovars that they would achieve independence in the end. Araud, noting the difference of "nuance" in the U.S. and French positions, suggested that time would tell whether it would be possible to have it both ways. Suggesting that the U.S. could afford to take a less "constrained" view, he reiterated that France saw a need to try to keep Russia on board with the promise of "real"

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negotiations without a pre-determined outcome. A/S Fried reiterated that it was enough for now for France simply to repeat that independence was unavoidable, suggesting it would be possible to avoid saying now what would happen in the event of a Russian veto. For his part, he would respond to questions by saying that the President's views were well known, that Sarkozy had called independence unavoidable, and that the U.S. hoped to negotiate a UNSCR.

Timing

¶11. (C) Carre noted that timing needed to be considered in addition to the substance of the message, arguing against being too clear too soon with respect to plans (B) and (C). A/S Fried responded that the Kosovars had already panicked over Sarkozy's original message, despite its clear identification of the end result. He repeated that the tension would remain between more ambiguity, which was good for Russia, and a more dangerous situation on the ground in the absence of clarity. Turning to the evening ministerial meeting, he assured Araud that word of the meeting would inevitably leak, and that it was therefore important to have

a message ready. Araud said he would check with the Presidency, suggesting again that citing Sarkozy's earlier statement would probably be the recommended course of action.

Modalities

¶12. (C) Araud asked how Fried envisioned the upcoming negotiation period, noting that the U.S. had said it wished to keep Ahtisaari "in the loop." A/S Fried clarified that Ahtisaari wanted "a" role in the process, but did not wish to run it himself. Araud suggested that the negotiations could perhaps proceed under the auspices of the Contact Group, at the end of which it could call the two parties to Vienna for a final round of mediation. But other questions remained: who would lead the negotiations?, or, should the final conference last one day or occur in Rambouillet format? Making clear he was only thinking aloud, A/S Fried said it would be important to involve the U.S. to assure the Kosovars, and the Europeans to bring along the EU. (He added that he was considering travel to Pristina in July to discuss next steps with the Kosovars, and told Araud he would want to coordinate with him on the public message he should convey about the European position.) Since it would also be important to isolate Serbian President Kostunica, it might also be necessary to include the Russians.

¶13. (C) Araud wondered again who should mediate the negotiations, agreeing with Fried indirectly that they should occur under the auspices of the Contact Group. At the same time, he thought it would be impractical for all six Contact Group reps to shuttle between Belgrade and Pristina. A/S Fried said he preferred a group approach, since it was important to avoid creating "a new Ahtisaari." Araud appeared to agree. Fried reminded Araud that the Serbs or Kosovars might be tempted to walk away from the negotiations at some point.

Substance

¶14. (C) On the substance of the negotiations, A/S Fried said it would be important not to re-open the Ahtisaari compromises, but perhaps they could focus on the timing and means of implementing them. Noting Putin's predilection for "surprises," he speculated that he would arrive in Kennebunkport with a Serbian proposal for new negotiations. Araud argued that reopening the Ahtisaari recommendations should not be excluded a priori, since they focused primarily on minority protections and took no position on independence. He asked whether a "Taiwan model" consisting of one country with two systems and no UNSC seat for Kosovo might be a way out. A/S Fried responded that postponing a UN seat for Kosovo could perhaps be part of a solution.

UDI

¶15. (C) Araud asked A/S Fried how the U.S. would respond if Kosovo did not accept U.S. advice and moved to a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI). A/S Fried assured Araud that the U.S. continued to advise the Kosovars against UDI. If they nonetheless did declare independence, he conceded that this would put the USG under pressure to recognize

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Kosovo, although recognition would not be automatic. How the U.S. responded would depend at least in part on how the Europeans planned to respond.

Abkhazia Linkage

¶16. (C) Araud noted that a six-month negotiating period would move final decisions past the Duma elections and speculated that this might make things easier for the

Russians. A/S Fried responded that the Russians were still making linkages to Abkhazia. It was not clear at this stage whether they were bluffing, but it would behoove the West to make clear to the Russians that recognition of Abkhazia was unacceptable and to support Georgian President Saakashvili. Failure to provide such support could force the Georgians to send troops to Abkhazia in the face of a likely provocation from the Abkhaz side, for instance the expulsion of ethnic Georgians. The Russians should not be permitted to become "revisionist and revanchist." Araud commented that they were already clearly revisionist.

Iran

¶17. (C) Counselor Cohen, noting that he had discussed the Iranian nuclear program that same morning with Secretary General for National Defense Francis Delon, said the U.S. saw an Iranian hand in Gaza, Lebanon, Iraq, and now Afghanistan. He said the U.S. intended now to push for further sanctions against Iran given that they appeared to be having some effect. Araud characterized the most recent meeting between EU High Rep Solana and Iranian negotiator Larijani as a "new failure," saying that the Iranians were now trying to reverse conditionality and put the onus on the West to take the first step. (He agreed that a third UNSC Resolution on sanctions was necessary, while using the occasion to complain that the U.S. had not consulted with France and the UK prior to tabling its latest. France would have liked to include sanctions against individuals, and also believed that Russia and China would not accept U.S. language on restricting Iranian access to international financial institutions.) Araud said France was on board for additional sanctions outside the UN framework, although getting there would involve a complicated interagency process. He reminded A/S Fried that some financial sanctions would fall under EU competence, where Germany and Italy were likely to resist.

France Fixed on Lebanon

¶18. (C) Araud told Counselor Cohen that France viewed Iran in large part through the prism of Lebanon, where its influence was judged to be not entirely negative. He described Iranian policy -- unlike Syria's -- as focused primarily on giving the Shia more power via Hizballah, in a way that respected the "Lebanese political game" and was not always destructive. Hizballah, he asserted, had accepted UNSCR 1701 at Iran's urging, even if Iran continued to smuggle weapons to Hizballah. The Syrians, not the Iranians, were behind the recent rocket attacks on Israel originating from southern Lebanon. He judged that Hizballah had no interest in inflaming southern Lebanon, given that the Hizballah-Israel conflict of summer 2006 had undermined its standing with its main constituency. Hizballah's main goal, he insisted, was simply to obtain a larger share of the power within Lebanon. If Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa's recent mediation had failed, this was not because of Hizballah but Nabih Berri, "the voice of Syria."

Engaging with Hizballah

¶19. (C) Araud judged that there was no alternative to engaging with Hizballah, given that it had legitimate grievances and that the central power had long ignored southern Lebanon. It was thus also necessary to engage with Iran, even if it was not entirely trustworthy. There was an opening with respect to Lebanon, and France believed that Iran was promoting the welfare of the Shia rather than war. Counselor Cohen reminded Araud that Hizballah, supported by Iran, was behind attacks on Israeli interests and that Iran was active against U.S. interests in Iraq and NATO interests in Afghanistan. Nor did the U.S. believe that Hizballah was committed to preserving the integrity of the Lebanese state; a parallel state with its own institutions was not acceptable. He reminded Araud that the U.S. also viewed

Hizballah as a terrorist organization.

¶20. (C) Araud claimed that Hizballah was last implicated in a terrorist act in Buenos Aires in 1994, and not since, and asked whether the U.S. had new information. Counselor Cohen assured him that Iran was working against the West in the Middle East, even if it was patient and disciplined. Araud said France viewed Iran as taking advantage of a situation in the Middle East rather than being engaged in a general offensive; it was a brutal regime ready to exploit a given situation. The U.S. intervention in Iraq was a gift to Iran, he said, destroying the Sunni rampart against the Persians. Araud described Lebanon as Iran's last hope for exporting its Islamic Revolution, and suggested that Iran was acting counter to its own interests in supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan ("we destroyed their worst enemy").

¶21. (C) Counselor Cohen argued that the Iranian presence in southern Iraq was already extensive before the Iraq intervention, and noted that the Iranians appeared willing to work with extremist Sunnis as well as Shia. Araud asked whether the U.S. distinguished between the Iranian government and the IRGC; Cohen responded that the IRGC was not a rogue actor. Araud asked why the Iranians did not remain quiet until the Shia majority assumed power in Iraq; Cohen responded that Iran had broader hegemonic aspirations, and that generational change was also hardening the Iranian position. Araud commented twice that the Iranians appeared to believe time was on their side.

Russia - CFE

¶22. (C) Carre worried that the Russian "suspension" of its CFE obligations had set in train a process that had taken on a life of its own and could no longer be arrested. He was doubtful that Russia would ever take sufficient steps (toward implementation of its Istanbul commitments) that would allow the U.S. to proceed toward ratification of the adapted Treaty (A/CFE). This could easily lead to the de facto unraveling of the CFE treaty within the next year and a half. France viewed the treaty as a minimum assurance for stability, and did not wish to see Russia in a position to deploy troops on its territory at will and without transparency. Russia was becoming increasingly unpredictable, with negative implications for Missile Defense (MD), Georgia-NATO relations, and possibly even Kaliningrad. He argued that it was time to consider new ideas, such as opening the treaty to accession by new members in advance of ratification, or negotiations on a revamped Treaty.

¶23. (C) A/S Fried questioned whether France was in favor of renegotiating the Treaty even if Russia withdrew. He also asked whether any renegotiation would be contingent on Russia remaining within the current Treaty. He cautioned that any negotiation should not legitimize what was in fact a unilateral Russian breach of the treaty, noting that there was a risk that long negotiations would leave the Russians without real constraints over a period of years. Carre took A/S Fried's points but insisted that there was a need to move rapidly -- in the next six to nine months -- to prevent Russia from doing something irreversible. Fried repeated that Russia would need to be in compliance with the Treaty before any negotiations could commence. He feared that Russia was not truly interested in negotiations, however, and that Putin was tempted to renounce the Treaty for political reasons. Araud and Carre cited Russian paranoia about encirclement; Fried countered by noting the Russian proclivity for basing relationships with neighbors on fear and domination.

¶24. (C) Araud suggested that the Allies might need to take legal steps if the Russians were in breach of the treaty, with Carre interjecting that clarifying the situation was not in anyone's political interest. Fried repeated that it was

the Russians who would likely be shortly in breach of the treaty, whether this was stated publicly or not. He proposed that Allies negotiate among themselves on next steps and be prepared to respond firmly. Araud lamented that a Russian decision to withdraw from the treaty would be extremely negative for the Europeans; "we would have to go back to spying." A/S Fried suggested that the Russians appeared to be comfortable in a controlled confrontation with the West.

125. (U) This message was cleared by A/S Fried.

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